Halal food certification in the UK and its impact on food businesses: A review in the context of the European Union.

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Abstract

The majority of Muslims only consume Halal food because they belief the consumption of such foods is a commandment from Allah (God). Whilst Halal food may be readily available in Muslim-majority countries, Muslims living in the West often encounter a great deal of difficulty in finding Halal food. This led to the establishment of several unregulated Halal Certification Bodies (HCBs) within the EU and other industrialised economies in an effort to assure Halal consumers that Halal certified products are consistent with the Islamic dietary laws. However, these HCBs operate according to varying Halal standards, brought about by differences in opinion regarding the interpretation of some aspects of the Islamic dietary laws enshrined in the Quran (Islamic Holy Book) and *Hadith* (Teachings of the Prophet of Islam). This has created confusion among food businesses and Halal consumers regarding what is true Halal, it also particularly makes the regulation of HCBs very cumbersome. This paper aims to review literature on the economic significance of the Halal food market and explore the activities of HCBs and the impact of these on UK Halal food businesses.

Keywords

Halal Certification Bodies, Halal food, Halal consumer, Halal slaughter, Muslims, Islam

Review Methodology

Literature searches were conducted using the following terminologies; Halal certification, Halal standards, Halal slaughter, Halal authorities, Halal market and Halal Certification Bodies. These searches were conducted through databases such as Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, Scientific Journals and the use of Halal Standards. The references in the articles obtained were then used for further review of literature. There were meetings with two HCBs in the UK to understand their operations and current development in the industry.

1. Introduction

Halal is an Arabic word that literally means anything that is permissible under Islamic law, the *Shariah*. Due to the emphasis of the Quran (Islamic Holy Book) and other scriptures on the need for Muslims to consume only Halal food, many Muslims consider the consumption of Halal food as a religious obligation [1-2]. It has been reported that whilst Muslims living in Muslim-majority countries (e.g. Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Somalia etc) may have easy access to Halal food (because all foods are assumed to be Halal in these countries), their counterparts in Muslim-minority countries (e.g. many Western countries) encounter a great deal of difficulty in sourcing Halal products [3]. This is because in many Muslim-minority countries, the majority of processed foods may contain non-Halal raw materials (e.g. pork or porcine derivatives) and the processing of Halal products may be done using equipment that are also used to process pork-based products [4], this leads to the contamination of Halal food. In addition, non-Muslims generally perform the slaughter of animals for human consumption in Muslim-minority countries, such

meats are therefore not recognised as suitable for Muslim consumption by some Muslim authorities. The general consensus within the Muslim community is that for meat to be Halal, the animal must be alive at the point of slaughter, the person bleeding the animal must be a Muslim who must recite a short prayer in Arabic (*Bismillah Allahu Akbar*- In the name of God, God is Great) at the time of slaughter and the appropriate blood vessels in the neck region must be severed to ensure sufficient blood loss and death [5-7]. However, it must be reiterated that the Quran explicitly permits Muslims to consume meat from animals slaughtered by followers of Christianity and Judaism [8-9]. Shaykh (Mufti) Taqi Usmani [10] extensively researched this subject matter and his opinion is that meat from animals slaughtered by Christians and Jews is permissible for Muslims. He cited *Tafsir* Ibn Kathir Vol. 2 p19 [11] to back his position. *Tafsir* is the critical interpretation and explanation of verses of the Quran. In addition, the following Quranic verse makes it lawful for Muslims to consume food (including meat) of the People of the Book (Christians and Jews) [12]:

"*This day (all) good foods have been made lawful, and the food of those who were given the Scripture (Christians and Jews) is lawful for you and your food is lawful for them.*"

The role of Halal Certification Bodies (HCBs) is to provide clarity as to what is Halal and what is not (*Haram*), and to certify food for consumption by Muslims. Some Muslims therefore regard Halal certification as an assurance of the Halal status of food. Due to the apparent economic benefits associated with trading in Halal foods, many food businesses in the West (e.g. Tesco, Sainsbury's, Morrisons, Aldi, Waitrose etc) have started stocking Halal food products [13]. It has been reported by Lever et al [14] that the rapid increase in the demand for Halal food in the Western world is due

to the exponentials expansion in Muslim population. In fact the Pew Research Centre [15] estimated that if the current trends continues, by the year 2050, the global Muslim population would have increased by 73% to 2.8 billion Muslims. The UK and France have been identified as the two EU countries where there has been uninterrupted increase in the demand for religiously slaughtered meat for over a decade [16]. The migration of Muslims across Europe has also been identified as a factor contributing to the rapid increase in the demand for Halal products within the EU [17]. The contribution of immigration to the increase in the demand of Halal products is highlighted by the recent exodus of people into Europe from mainly Muslim countries. In 2015 alone, according to the BBC [18], over one million migrants were admitted into the EU, the majority of whom were Muslims escaping from wars and religious extremism.

The importance of HCBs in providing assurance to Halal consumers on the Halal status of food, and the facilitation of the trading in Halal food products for UK food businesses cannot be underestimated. However, the lack of a unified global Halal standard hinders the growth of the Halal market and creates confusion among Halal Food Business Operators (HFBOs) and Halal consumers as to the true definition of authentic Halal. There is also the issue of the high fees charged by HCBs that may be unsustainable to many food businesses in the UK. This paper reviews literature on the economic significance of the Halal food market, and considers the impact of the lack of a unified Halal standard and other gaps in the Halal certification industry on HFBOs in the UK and across Europe.

2. The Halal Food Market

As already noted above, the exponential growth of the population of Muslims in Europe has led to an unprecedented rise in the demand for Halal food. Although this

demand has largely been attributed to an increase in population due to the migration of Muslims across Europe, it has been reported by Campbell and Colleagues [19] that the consumption of Halal meat by non-Muslims is on the increase across Europe. Despite this assertion, it must be reiterated that some non-Muslims have express their dismay about the unintentional consumption of Halal meat. This is because the mainstream retail multiples have been reported to be selling ritually slaughtered meat (by Muslims and Jews) without labelling it as such due to the lack of legislation within the EU for meat to be labelled as Halal or according to any other method of slaughter [20]. On the other side of the argument are those non-Muslims who would consciously consume Halal meat even when it is clearly labelled as Halal. This group of non-Muslim Halal consumers willingly dine in ethnic restaurants that clearly advertise their meat as Halal.

Meat is an important constituent in the diet of Muslims. However, the consumption of lamb is exceptionally high among the UK Muslim population. A study commissioned by the English Beef and Lamb Executive (EBLEX) [21] reported that despite the fact that Muslims represent less than 5% of the UK population, they consume in excess of 20% of the lamb produced in the UK. The report explained that the purchase of meat by Halal consumers of both white and red meat is broken down as 70%, 60%, 50% and 28% of chicken, lamb, mutton and beef respectively. The report indicated that Muslims prefer to purchase fresh meat; they either wash and store it or cook it fresh, this, according to the authors, is a cultural norm among Muslims. The study also revealed that 72% of Muslims buy their meat at least once a week whilst a further 25% buy meat several times a week. A recent study by Ahmed [22] on the marketing of Halal meat in the UK found that Halal consumers prefer to buy their meats from Muslim operated local butchers in comparison with the mainstream retail multiples. It

is therefore not surprising that the mainstream supermarkets (e.g. Tesco) have started opening Muslim operated meat counters in some of their stores.

3. Halal Food Certification

In the UK alone, there are at least 12 Halal Certification bodies all operating according to varying Halal standards and competing with each other for a share of the Halal certification market. Table 1 is a list of some of the HCBs in the UK. Many Halal consumers in the West will only accept a food product as Halal if it is certified by a Muslims organisation (e.g. a HCB). Similarly, Bonne and Verbeke [23] reported that Halal consumers in Belgium indicated that they had more confidence in Halal foods monitored and certificated by Islamic institutions. Their findings also revealed that Belgian Muslims prefer to purchase their meats from Muslim butchers since there is a perception that Muslim butchers can protect the integrity of Halal meat compared to their non-Muslim counterparts. Halal food certification, although viewed by many Halal consumers as a religious duty in helping consumers eat authentic Halal food, has become big business. According to SalaamGateway.com, the value of the global Halal certification industry in 2015 was estimated to be $12.5 billion [24]. The report indicated that there are over 400 unregulated global HCBs, and the amount of money spent by Halal consumers on food and drinks alone is estimated to be $1.2 trillion. Table 2 (adapted from the SalamGateway's April 2016 report) shows the key players in the global Halal certification industry and the specific roles they play in accrediting national HCBs, whilst table 3 lists the major HCBs within the EU and their level of recognition by the major global players. For instance, in the UK, although there are in excess of 12 HCBs, Halal food products to be exported to Malaysia and Indonesia must be certified by either the Halal Food Authority (HFA) or Halal Certification Europe (formerly known as The Muslim Food Board). It must be noted that Halal

Certification Europe (HCE) does not certify meat-based products, their main scope is the certification of non-meat processed foods and ingredients. The Halal Monitoring Committee (HMC) is the UK's largest certifier of meat from animals slaughtered without stunning for the Halal market, however certificates issued by the organisation are only recognised by the UAE authorities (see table 3), this means products certified by the HMC cannot officially be exported to either Malaysia or Indonesia. This is because the HMC is neither accredited by the Malaysian nor the Indonesian authorities (represented by JAKIM and MUI respectively). HFBOs are therefore limited in their choice of suitable HCBs, for instance, a UK Halal meat supplier wishing to export meat products to say, Malaysia from the UK will have to use the HFA, unless the HFBO is willing to consider HCBs from other EU countries who hold accreditation for Malaysia (Table 3).

As part of the search for literature on Halal certification, the author had informal meetings with two HCBs, the Halal Food Authority (HFA) and Halal Consultations Limited (HCL) to understand their certification procedures, standards and scope of certification. The scope of the two HCBs is similar; they both certify meat and processed food and their Halal standards also permit the pre-slaughter stunning of animals for Halal production. However, HCL approves the certification of Kosher meat (Jewish or Shechita slaughter) as Halal whilst the HFA does not.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

3.1 Why the need for Halal food certification

Observant Muslims always insist on the consumption of Halal food. In countries where there is high risk of cross-contamination of Halal with non-halal raw materials (e.g. within the EU), many Muslims become more cautious about what they eat and would therefore buy only Halal certified products. For instance, Bergeaud-Blackler

and Bonne [25] reported that 84% of the French Muslims they surveyed in a consumer study indicated that they do not eat any other food but Halal verified foods. Also, at a recent Halal conference organised by EBLEX in the UK [26], it was reported that there is a potential for the export of UK Halal beef and lamb to countries like China, the UAE, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Algeria and others. The majority of these countries require all Halal products to be certified by an accredited HCB from the originating country before such products can be imported. Despite the challenges facing HCBs (see below) their role in the export of products from the UK and the rest of Europe to Muslim-majority countries cannot be underestimated. Shafie and Othman [27] reported that Halal certification is an important marketing tool that can be used to effectively communicate the Halal status of food through the use of Halal logos and Halal certificates issued by reputable HCBs. In a survey involving 1000 Malaysian Halal consumers, Shafie and Othman found that 89% of the respondents indicated that the presence of a Halal logo on food packaging is the main driving force influencing their purchasing decisions.

[INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

3.2 Constraints of Halal certification

As noted above, Halal certification can be used as a vital tool in assuring Halal consumers on the Halal status of food, and can also facilitate the marketing of food products that comply with the Halal requirements both for local consumption and for export. However, the lack of national overarching authorities within the Muslim community and the reluctance of Western governments to regulate the industry have meant that the Halal logos and certificates are used fraudulently [28-31]. Van Waarden and van Dalen [32] observed that for the Muslims consumer, food fraud is not a mere issue of deceit, Muslims belief the consumption of Halal food is a moral

and religious obligation which they are answerable to God on the Day of Judgement. Due to the lack of monitoring of HCBs, any person with little or no understanding of the *Shariah* law, food safety and animal welfare legislative requirements in the UK may be responsible for making decisions about the Halal status of food. Also, the lack of a unified global halal standard, which results in lack of trust or mutual recognition between HCBs, is another area that has created gaps in the certification industry [33]. Encouragingly, the International Halal Integrity Alliance (IHIA) [34] and the OIC [35] have vowed to harmonise the numerous conflicting Halal standards into a globally recognised Halal standard. The lack of a global Halal standard has resulted in debate within the Muslim community regarding the acceptability of the following procedures for Halal slaughter and the further processing of meat:

- The pre-slaughter stunning of animals and poultry. Stunning is defined in European regulation, EC 1099/2009 as "any intentionally induced process which causes loss of consciousness and sensibility without pain, including any process resulting in instantaneous death".
- The use of a fixed mechanical blade for the slaughter of Halal poultry
- The use of thoracic (chest) sticking for bleeding ruminants
- The acceptability of meat from animals slaughtered by Christians and Jews. Although the Quran (Quran 5:5) permits Muslims to eat meat slaughtered by Jews and Christians, some HCBs do not approve this type of meat.
- The processing of Halal meat and non-Halal meat using the same equipment. This is a major issue in the UK and other Western countries where Halal is usually processed in conjunction with non-Halal materials within the same environment.

[INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE][36]

4. Impact of Halal certification on Halal food businesses

The cost of Halal certification can have a negative impact on the profit margins of small to medium sized HFBOs. Hayat and colleagues [37] observed that the Halal certification process requires significant financial investment and takes considerable amount of time to complete. They explained that the cost of certifying a financial product as Halal is $122,000 and takes 2-3 months to complete. Other certifiers have indicated that, depending on the complexity of the manufacturing facility and processes, the certification could take at least 6 weeks to complete [Personal Communication, Amer Rashid (Technical Advisor- Halal Certification Organisation UK), 2017]. According to the UK's Halal Monitoring Committee (HMC), they charge poultry abattoirs about £0.02 per chicken [38]. Although this may appear insignificant, an abattoir slaughtering 70,000 to 100,000 birds a day will be expected to invest a significant amount of money to cover the cost of their Halal certification. One of Ireland's major HCBs, the Department of Halal Certification charges a fee of €500 for each site visit/ audit and a further €300 per product (non-meat) [39]. In 2011, some Halal butchers in the UK expressed dismay at the mode of regulation of Halal meat adopted by one of the Halal meat certifiers in the UK [40] because the butchers felt the process was costly and lacked transparency. Lever and Mile (2012) reported that a Halal meat company in France, *Halaldom* resorted to "self certification" because they could not afford the fee charged by the French Halal meat certifier, AVS Association. Halaldom does not advertise their products as "Halal certified" but claim their products are "Halal guaranteed". Despite the reported cost implication of Halal certification on profit margins, some experts in the UK Halal meat industry have stated that Halal certification is a commercial decision and any investment in Halal certification is easily offset by spreading of overheads over increased production and

the subsequent increase in revenue [Personal Communication, Rizvan Khalid (Executive Director-Euro Quality Lambs), 2017]. The additional cost of Halal certification is likely to be passed on to the Halal consumer in most instances. The existence of several Halal standards makes it difficult for FBOs to understand the requirements of Halal production. It must be noted that although a unified Halal standard may not necessarily have an impact on the certification fees charged by these Halal certifiers, it would undoubtedly provide clarity on a universally agreed definition of Halal. A unified global Halal standard will therefore offer FBOs the opportunity to operate on a level playing ground.

5. Conclusion

The rapid expansion of the population of Muslims across Europe has resulted in an unprecedented increase in the demand for Halal food products. In an effort to assure Halal consumers of the compliance of food products to the Islamic dietary laws, several HCBs have been formed to regulate the production of Halal food. Halal certification provides mainstream food businesses in the Western world the opportunity to trade in Halal food products. However, the lack of a unified global Halal standard makes it difficult for Western food businesses to understand the requirements of Halal food production, this is due to the contrasting views presented in the various Halal standards. In addition, there is a concern about the time taken by HCBs to complete the certification process and the fees charged by these certifiers for Halal certification. Small food businesses wishing to enter the Halal food market may be deterred by the high cost of certification fees. The formation of a regulation body responsible for approving and monitoring the activities of HCBs in the UK will ensure that such organisations have the necessary technical expertise and Shariah knowledge to operate. This will also ensure that the fee charged for Halal certification

is regulated to reflect the services they offer. Further research is need in the area of Halal certification to understand the differences in Halal standards, certification procedures, foreign recognitions (accreditations) and the certification fee structures used by the various HCBs. This will help HFBOs the opportunity to make informed decisions when choosing a HCB.

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Table 1. A list of some Halal Certification Bodies in the UK

Halal Certification Body	**Website**

European Halal Development Agency	http://ehda.co.uk
Halal Assure-IP	http://www.halalassure-ip.co.uk
Halal Authority Board	http://www.haboard.com
Halal Certification Europe (formerly The Muslim Food Board)	http://www.tmfb.net
Halal Certification Organisation	http://halalcertificationorganisation.co.uk
Halal Consultations Limited	http://halalconsultations.com
Halal Food Authority	http://halalfoodauthority.com
Halal Monitoring Board	http://www.hmbhalal.com
Halal Monitoring Committee	http://www.halalhmc.org
Sharia Halal Board	http://www.shariahalalboard.org

Table 2

A list of the major players in the global Halal industry with the specific roles they play (adapted from the SalamGateway April 2016 report)

Player	Activity			Profile
	Accreditation	Standards	Certification	
Standard and Metrology Institute for the Islamic Countries (SMIIC)	Potential	Focus	Not a focus	SMIIC represents the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) with a mandate to develop a

				unified global Halal standard
Emirates Authority for Standardization and Metrology (ESMA)	Not a focus	Focus	Not a focus	ESMA is a standardization body in the UAE responsible for the development of *Shariah*-compliant Halal standards
Department of Standards Malaysia (DSM)	Focus	Focus	Not a focus	The DSM is describes itself as Malaysia's national standards and accreditation
Dubai Accreditation Centre (DAC)	Focus	Not a focus	Not a focus	DAC is recognised by ESMA as an accreditation body for foreign HCBs
GCC Accreditation	Focus	Not a	Not a focus	GAC acts on

Centre (GAC)		focus		behalf of the GCC member states (Yemen, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar) in accrediting foreign HCBs
Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM)	Unofficial HCB recognition	Not a focus	Focus	JAKIM is responsible for recognizing or accrediting foreign HCBs for the export of Halal products to Malaysia
Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI)	Unofficial HCB recognition	Not a focus	Focus	MUI is a HCB in Indonesia and it is the sole body responsible for recognizing or

				accrediting foreign HCB for Halal products destined to the Indonesian market
Majlis Ugama Islam Singapore (MUIS)	Unofficial HCB recognition	Not a focus	Focus	MUIS is the sole HCB in Singapore and they are responsible for accrediting foreign HCB for the export of Halal products to the country

Table 3

A list of some EU HCBs and the status of their recognition/accreditation by some of the major players in the global Halal industry (Adapted from Fuseini et al, 2017 [36])

Halal Certification Body (HCB)	Accreditation of HCB in Halal-importing country			
	Malaysia (JAKIM)	Indonesia (MUI)	Singapore (MUIS)	UAE
Halal Control, Germany	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Halal Feed and Food Inspection Authority, The Netherlands	Yes	Yes	Unknown	Yes
Halal Food Authority, UK	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Halal Food Council of Europe, Belgium	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Halal Institute of Spain, Spain	No	Yes	Yes	No
Halal International Authority, Italy	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Halal Monitoring Committee, UK	No	No	No	Yes
Halal Quality Control, The Netherlands	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Islamic Information and Documentation Centre, Austria	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Ritual Association of Lyon Great Mosque, France	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
The Grand Mosque of Paris-SFCVH, France	No	Yes	Unknown	Unknown
The Muslim Religious Union in Poland, Poland	Yes	Yes	Unknown	Unknown
Total Quality Halal Correct, The Netherlands	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes